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CAN THE U.S. ADEQUATELY PROTECT ITS FORCES ?

By

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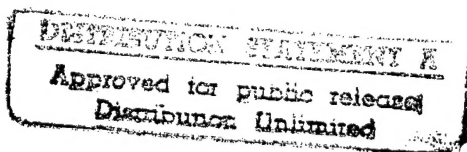
A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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| 15. Abstract: There are those who believe that if they can cause enough casualties or threats of casualties to U.S. forces, they can weaken support in the U.S. for our presence in the region or weaken support in the host nations for a continued U.S. presence. This approach worked for terrorists when they attacked U.S. forces in Beirut in 1983 because our objectives for being there were unclear. Terrorists were not successful after attacking Khobar Towers because the U.S. has strategic interests in maintaining a force presence in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region and in conducting coalition military operations to contain regional aggression. A military presence demonstrates U.S. commitment to the security of our friends and allies in the region and grants the U.S. access to critical facilities needed to defend its vital interests. In order for the U.S. to continue to protect its vital interests in the region, the U.S. must develop better and more efficient ways of protecting its forces and making these forces less vulnerable to terrorist attack. Fusion cells will provide operational and tactical commanders with timely intelligence which may help them better prepare for terrorist attacks. The services and allied forces need to unify their force protection efforts to combat the terrorist threat. Force protection information must be shared by all commands. The U.S. must continue to look for ways to reduce U.S. force vulnerability to terrorist attack. Improvements for physical security have been made, but the best solution is to reduce the number of U.S. forces overseas. We can do that now through effectively and efficiently employing our expeditionary forces. Through these measures, the U.S. can combat the terrorist threat while continuing to protect its vital interests around the world, and at the same time protecting its most vital resource - the American fighting man and woman. | | | |
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The opposition in the Middle East region includes extremist groups who are cold-blooded and fanatical, but also clever. They know that they cannot defeat us militarily, but they may believe that they can defeat us politically--and they have chosen terror as the weapon to try to achieve this. They estimate that if they can cause enough casualties or threats of casualties to our force, they can weaken support in the United States for our presence in the region.¹

Dr. William J. Perry, SEC DEF

In order to deter the terrorists from achieving their objective, the U.S. must develop better and more efficient methods of protecting its forces and making these forces less vulnerable to terrorist attack. The U.S. can do this by allowing commanders immediate access to up-to-date intelligence through fusion cells, unifying force protection efforts among all services, and cutting back the number of forces overseas through the efficient use of expeditionary forces.

On the morning of 23 October 1983, a suicide bomber drove his truck into the Marine Barracks at Beirut International Airport killing 241 of this countries finest servicemen. Shocked by the number of casualties, our nation's leaders chose to withdraw the Marines from Beirut thus ending the U.S. mission which was to maintain order among warring nations and extremist groups in Lebanon.² The

troops were withdrawn because the cost in lives of this operation exceeded the value of its objective.

Thirteen years later on 25 June 1996, a fuel truck parked next to the northern perimeter fence at the Khobar Towers complex exploded killing nineteen American service members and seriously injuring hundreds more.³ This time however, the terrorist act was not successful because the security and stability of the gulf region ranks as a "vital national interest for the United States."⁴ Therefore the U.S. continues to maintain a strong military force to deter threats to the free flow of oil around the world and to serve as a deterrence to rogue nations (Iran and Iraq) by reminding them that the U.S. will fight to defend its vital interests in the region. But the U.S. must continue to improve its force protection measures to ensure the security of its forces in the region and keep casualties to a minimum.

Following both bombing incidents, investigations were conducted to review the incidents and the operations themselves. The investigations identified two common operational shortcomings: 1) commanders lacked accurate and timely intelligence, and 2) force protection practices were inconsistent among the services and our allies.⁵

In an effort to prevent similar occurrences, both investigations recommended the Secretary of Defense take the following corrective actions: 1) improve the collection, analysis, and dissemination of intelligence, and 2) standardize the efforts of all services to combat the terrorist threat to include command and control.⁶

The Long Commission which investigated the 1983 Beirut bombing found that our human intelligence and counter-intelligence capabilities had eroded. The commission recommended that immediate actions to address this significant shortfall be taken.⁷ Yet, 13 years later, the Downing investigation of the Khobar Towers bombing identified the same shortcoming and recommended essentially the same fix - the U.S. intelligence community must have the requisite authorities and invest more time, people, and funds into developing HUMINT against the terrorist threat.⁸ The Secretary of Defense seconded the Downing Report's finding when he said, "we must get better at gathering intelligence so that we can pre-empt or disrupt terrorist operations before they can come to fruition."⁹ But at this time, we continue to downsize the intelligence community both through personnel and the budget thus limiting our ability to improve

the human intelligence capability as recommended by the report. With less agents, it makes it more difficult to recruit people.¹⁰ Like the military, the intelligence community is forced to do more with less. Policy restrictions on recruitment of sources may also hamper the efforts of national intelligence agencies and should be reexamined.¹¹ The U.S. has to make intelligence available in a timely manner to the forces threatened and to combine national intelligence with the local intelligence being collected.

One way the U.S. can improve intelligence is through fusion cells. This cell combines national strategic intelligence, which is gathered from around the world, with local or tactical intelligence. Analysts can quickly "fuse" together the global picture and the regional picture to help see patterns, keep information from falling through the cracks and to focus U.S. and its allies' intelligence services on the same pieces of information at the same time. It emphasizes the timely delivery of useful information to not only the operational commander, but also the tactical commander.¹² Through fusion cells, the operational commander can possibly get intelligence information in a more timely

manner in order to set into motion more stringent force protection measures designed to contend with various types of terrorist strikes. Fusion cells may not provide as effective information as human intelligence, but under the constraints of less money and fewer people, they do help commanders receive information that could protect U.S. forces.

Another significant finding from the Downing Report was that security policies and standards, doctrine, tactics, techniques, and procedures, and resources available varied significantly among both service and joint forces.¹³ Force protection practices were inconsistent.¹⁴ In other words, the services need to unify their efforts to combat the terrorist threat. In his report, General Downing praised the Army for force protection preparation prior to the Khobar Towers incident. He also praised the Marine Fleet Antiterrorism Security Teams (FAST) for being the most impressive security forces observed in the theater, and recommended they be used as a model for the other service training programs.¹⁵ If CENTCOM had standardized the Army and Marine Corps techniques and procedures, perhaps Khobar Towers might not have happened. DoD's "fix" to the problem has been to establish a permanent office within the Joint Staff (J-34) to deal with

all matters of combating terrorism. The new office will help assist field commanders with force protection matters and will help the Chairman ensure that force protection considerations are included in every aspect of military activities worldwide. This new office will develop new training procedures and technology while forming assessment teams to ensure that all commands instill formalized procedures to combat terrorism. These assessment teams will eventually visit every U.S. military base or installation around the world, providing expert analysis of security procedures. Each team will be comprised of up to 12 people and include security/operational specialists and structural engineers. The regional commanders and the services will decide who gets assessed.¹⁶ In other words, another level of bureaucracy has been added to micromanage the unified commanders on force protection issues.

Rather than create a huge force protection bureaucracy, allow the unified commands to create their own force protection experts to deal with these matters. In fact, every unified command currently has a force protection office with experts in their particular region of the world. Establish a small office at the joint staff to serve as a

central point for information so all commands stay current on force protection issues, and to ensure the commands are talking with one another. Develop a crosstalk program so that commands can share good ideas with one another. Each theater is different and has different terrorist threats. If you try to standardize force protection procedures for all theaters, what works in one theater may not work in another. The assessment team visits will be one more unnecessary irritant for which U.S. forces will have to prepare. Prior to a team's visit, there will be a tendency for the units to focus on passing the assessment (inspection) rather than on the real world threat. Commanders must ensure the service components are communicating with one another through the force protection office concerning all matters dealing with security. By adopting good force protection practices, regardless of which service provides them, commanders will be better able to combat the terrorist threat and protect their forces.

Along with improving unity of effort, command and control be given specific authority and responsibility for force protection of all combatant units in a geographical region. One man or woman needs to be in charge in a

geographic region in order to get a unified approach to force protection. The Goldwater/Nichols legislation assigned great power to the unified combatant commanders. The law's intent was to strengthen joint operational command while leaving the services the mission of training, equipping, and sustaining the force. Force protection is an operational issue.

Ultimately, it is an inherent function of command. When Secretary Perry introduced his new military force protection measures, he alluded to establishing CENTCOM headquarters in the region rather than in Florida. He wanted to do this so the joint commander would not have to delegate operational control of forces in his theater to the service component because doing so dilutes the concept of unit of command and circumvents the real intent of Goldwater/Nichols which was to put joint commanders in charge of operational matters.¹⁷

Unfortunately, in some geographic regions like CENTCOM's, the host nation will not allow the U.S. to establish a headquarters in country. But the JTF Commander has the authority and responsibility to establish policy and directive authority to implement and enforce the CinCCENT force protection policies and directives.

As a result of the Khobar Towers bombing, the United States has dramatically acted to increase the physical security of our military personnel in the region to reduce their vulnerability to terrorist attacks. 4000 air crew personnel who were stationed in Riyadh and Dhahran to enforce the no-fly zone over Iraq, have been relocated to the Saudi airbase at Al-Kharj, known as Prince Sultan Air Base. Here, authorities believe our forces will be safe from the high-risk urban environment which permitted terrorists to park a bomb-laden truck too close to the living quarters. At the new base, the outer fence lies no closer than three miles to the inner perimeter which protects the 4000 people, 78 aircraft and 25,000 tons of equipment that are consolidated at Prince Sultan. This remote location in the desert will provide effective defenses against similar terrorist attacks in the future. But what happens if the terrorists choose a different method of attack? Now the American troops are massed in a small area leaving them with little protection inside the fence. In other words, there will be no place for the troops to hide if the terrorists attack using battlefield rockets similar to the ones the Lebanese guerrillas used to terrorize northern Israel. When asked whether or not the air

base had any way to detect and warn of such an attack on his troops, the commanding general replied, "when the first one lands."¹⁸

Some of the units in Saudi Arabia cannot be relocated without degrading their effectiveness. The security assistance personnel who train and advise the Saudi military must be in close proximity to their Saudi counterparts in the capital and at various bases. The Patriot missile battery crews must be located near urban areas and air bases that they defend. While these units must continue to work where they are now, steps are being taken to improve their security by consolidating and moving them to more secure housing areas. More guards and barriers will be provided to enhance their protection and lessen the impact of any future attacks.¹⁹ By consolidating, the troops are protected from car/truck bomb attacks, but they are now vulnerable to attack from rockets. By bunching our troops into a confined area, the terrorists now have a even better opportunity to inflict more casualties if they attack with rockets or mortars. Even though this isolated location is easier to protect, our troops are still susceptible to terrorist attack. The bottom

line is to **minimize** the threat of attack against U.S. forces.

So how can we do that?

Right now, the regional CINC's dilemma is that he must organize his forces so that they are not vulnerable to terrorist attack but are still able to accomplish the mission. One way to minimize the threat of attack while still accomplishing the mission is to cut forces overseas to lessen the risk of losses in preemptive attacks.²⁰ The CINC currently has the capability to reduce the operational footprint of his forces to the bare minimum through the maximum use of expeditionary forces stationed at sea and on land.

It is essential that U.S. strategic planners continue to employ the Naval Expeditionary Forces (NEF) in the region. NEFs are capable of enforcing the no-fly zone in Iraq by flying approximately 100 sorties per day, which is significantly below the advertised carrier air wing sorties per day of 200 to 250.²¹ By remaining offshore and maneuverable, NEFs are difficult for terrorists to target, thus providing another successful means of protecting the forces. With the proliferation of arms however, it is becoming increasingly easier for enemy forces and terrorists

to attain anti-ship weapons such as silkworms and exocet missiles making our naval forces more vulnerable to attack. Even with these difficulties, the NEFs continue to be the best option in protecting our forces since they are not easily accessible and can be maneuvered to avoid a terrorist attack. They also do not require host nation approval to be in the region.

Another way the U.S. might be able to reduce its presence overseas is by committing to an experimental war-fighting concept known as an air power expeditionary force (AEF). Such a force would keep designated combat squadrons from different wings ready to deploy with three days' notice.²² If AEFs become part of the infrastructure, what this means to the Air Force is that it would not have to keep so many people overseas. In the Persian Gulf for example, there are currently 6500 Air Force members at any one time. Their mission is to stay in the region to enforce the U.N. resolution banning Iraqi military flights in southern Iraq. An AEF is an airpower package (usually between 30 to 40 aircraft) that the NCA may deploy to defuse a developing crisis situation, to quickly increase a theater's airpower.

capability, or to maintain a constant theater airpower capability.²³

An AEF is comprised of units that have previously deployed and trained together and are now postured for short-notice crisis response.²⁴ An AEF would provide a way to quickly get a powerful combat force to the region if Iraq threatened military action, eliminating the need to keep people there just in case Iraq did anything. Thus this concept would reduce the force structure required in theater. With fewer people deployed overseas, this would cut down on the number of people who would be exposed to terrorist attack.

Currently, AEFs are composed of only Air Force units; however, this role could be expanded into joint operations. The Navy could provide air assets when the carrier-based aircraft are in home port. Each AEF would contain air-to-air fighters, air-to-ground fighters with precision-guided munitions capability, electronic-warfare aircraft and bombers. AEF forces exemplify the smaller, lighter, more-mobile forces Pentagon officials desire.

To date, three AEF deployments have been completed, one in Bahrain, one in Jordan, and the third in Qatar. Each has

lasted approximately three months, and when completed has left some propositioned equipment (vehicles, tents, ground equipment, bombs) in storage for future deployments. Since the terrorists would not be sure where and when the AEFs would be deployed, they could not make detailed plans on striking the American forces. So far each deployment has lasted about three months, but the time required for the AEFs to remain in theater is left to the regional CINC. Because the AEF is on a fluid schedule, it would be very difficult for enemy forces or terrorists to get an exact timetable to prepare for an attack. The one disadvantage to an AEF is the bases require host nation approval. Currently, the nations participating are strong supporters of the concept.²⁵

The NEFs would be the primary military force in the region with the AEFs serving in an augmenting role during high operations tempo periods. By employing the AEFs, the CINC could fill the gap between carrier rotations to bring theater airpower up to the level enjoyed before the carrier departed.²⁶

We will still need to continue overseas presence to maintain relations with foreign governments for access to facilities; demonstrate security commitments; and support

broadier missions such as political stabilization, deterrence, and war-prevention.²⁷ What the expeditionary forces give us is the capability to protect our vital interests, while at the same time reduce our forces overseas to lessen the risk of losses to terrorism. If casualties can be kept to a minimum, the terrorists will not be able to weaken U.S. support for our presence in the region.

CONCLUSION

Some enemies believe that our greatest vulnerability is the American intolerance for casualties in the pursuit of objectives that often do not have an apparent direct link to vital national objectives. Today, these enemies use terrorism to try to attain their objective of removing forces from the region.

The U.S. forces will remain because the security and stability of the gulf region ranks as one of our vital national interests. Therefore, the U.S. must continue to look for ways to improve its force protection efforts and making our forces less vulnerable to terrorist attack.

In the intelligence arena, fusion cells can help commanders attain information that may allow them to anticipate where a terrorist might strike next making him or

her better able to combat that threat. The services and our allies must unify their efforts to develop the best ways to stop the terrorist threat. DoD has taken a big step to accomplish this goal by establishing a central office in the Pentagon. Though this creates an extra level of bureaucracy, at least there is a place to consolidate information concerning force protection issues. In an attempt to protect the physical security of our forces, DoD has isolated our troops from the car/truck bomb threat, but exposed them to the rocket/mortar threat. Hopefully, the terrorists will not strike at this vulnerability in the future. In any event, there is no such thing as a perfect defense against terrorism. Through the expeditionary forces, the U.S. does have the capability to reduce the number of troops stationed overseas. With fewer people, the force protection job would be easier for the U.S. since there would not be so many to worry about, plus the terrorists would have less people to target.

Even though 19 lives were lost at Khobar Towers, if it were not for the fact that U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia acted on the general threat intelligence available prior to the bombing, more lives would have been lost. Perhaps in the

thirteen years since the Beirut bombing, we have gotten better at protecting our forces. Prior to the bombing, over 130 separate force protection enhancements were undertaken - barriers were raised and moved out, fences strengthened, entrances restricted, guard forces increased. The enhancements were aimed at a variety of potential threats, ranging from bombs to attempts to poison food and water supplies. The enhancements may well have saved hundreds of lives by preventing penetration by bombers into the center of the compound. If these measures hadn't been instituted, perhaps the casualty count would have been much higher. This force protection issue is a neverending battle that we must continue to improve.

NOTES

¹ Dr. William Perry, Report To The President and the Congress, (15 September 1996).

² Report of the DoD Commission on Beirut International Airport Terrorist Act, (December 1983).

³ Jack Weible, "Anti-Terrorism: A Full-Time Job," Air Force Times, (12 May, 1997), 8.

⁴ Dr. William Perry, "DoD's Reevaluation of the Force Protection Posture: From Report to the President and Congress on the Protection of U.S. Forces Deployed Abroad," Defense Issues, (September 1996), 9.

⁵ Report of the DoD Commission on Beirut International Airport Terrorist Act, (15 September 1996); Force Protection Assessment of USCENTCOM AOR and Khobar Towers Report of the Downing Assessment Task Force, (August 1996).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Report on Beirut International Airport Terrorist Act.,

⁸ The Downing Assessment Task Force Report, (15 September 1996), viii.

⁹ Dr. William Perry, "Report to the President and the Congress," (15 September 1996).

¹⁰ Comments made by Elizabeth McIntyre, Faculty Representative for the CIA at the Naval War College, April 1997.

¹¹ The Downing Assessment Task Force Report, (15 September 1996), 8.

¹² Perry, Report to the President and the Congress, 9.

¹³ The Downing Assessment Task Force Report, 9.

¹⁴ Ibid, Finding 5, 26.

¹⁵ Ibid, 26.

¹⁶ Jack Weible, "Facing 'A Different Threat,' Office to Combat Terrorism Born Out of Khobar Bombing," Army Times, (12 May 1997), 28.

¹⁷ Perry, Report to the President and the Congress, 11.

¹⁸ William Matthews, "Terrorism's Fallout," Air Force Times, (2 December 1996), 8.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ David S. Yost, "The Future of U.S. Overseas Presence," Joint Forces Quarterly, (Summer 1995), 78.

²¹ Comments made by Commander Bill Bond, 19 year Navy F-14 pilot, Served on aircraft carriers for 16 of 19 years.

²² The Air Expeditionary Force, Online. Internet. <<http://www.max1.au.mil>>, (24 October 1996).

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Julie Bird, "Quick-Strike Forces Could Reduce Gulf Deployments," Air Force Times, (24 February 1997), 10.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Yost, Joint Forces Quarterly, 78.

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